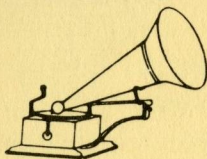


# Hillandale

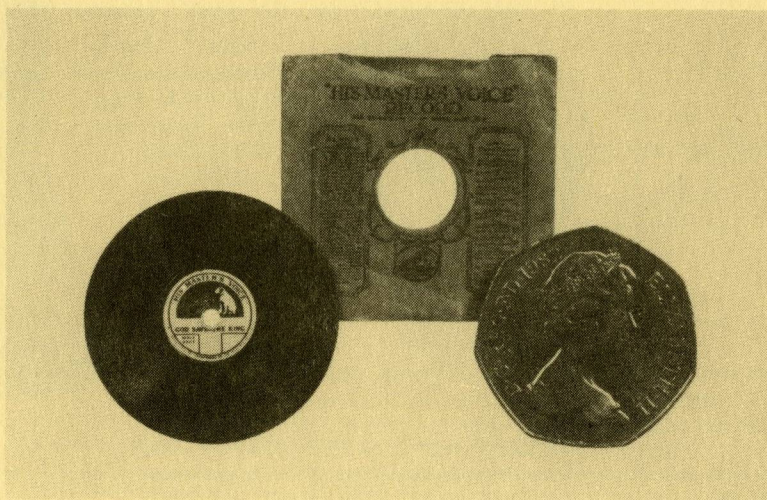


Journal of the  
City of London  
Phonograph and  
Gramophone Society

THE HILLANDALE NEWS

April 1986 No. 149

ISSN-0018-1846



A Queen Mary's Dolls' House record

Sold by The Gramophone Company at the time of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley (with a 50p. piece to show the photograph was not taken in 1924).



*"If Natural and Clear, 'tis the SONAT you hear"*

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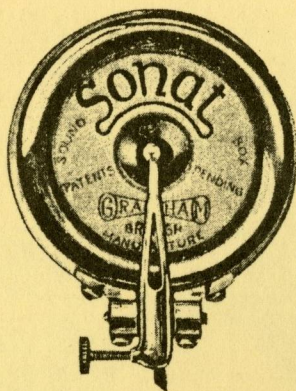
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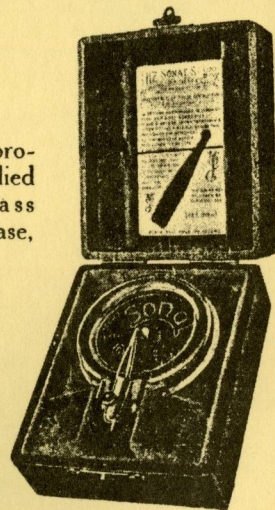
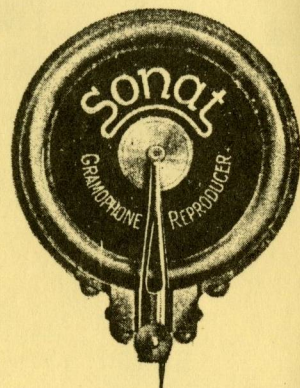
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GOODS  
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WORTH  
GOOD  
PACKING."



FOR FULL PARTICULARS REFER TO BOOKLETS G.D. 4 AND G.D. 4A.

The Sonat soundbox was fitted to Alfred Graham's Algraphones in the 1920s. Graham was perhaps more famous for his Amplion radio horns



## THE HILLANDALE NEWS

Official Journal of the City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society  
(founded 1919)

EDITOR: Christopher Proudfoot, [REDACTED]

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There is, they say, many a true word spoken in jest, and I had an uncomfortable feeling of near-the-knuckleness last October when our cartoonist showed one gramophone collector's wife remarking to another, as they attended to the catering arrangements, that she could not see how 'they' could keep on finding things to say about playing a record on a machine. One wonders what she would have found to say about an ARSC convention (three days of talk about records - they're not even interested in machines), but more seriously, there are times when one fears that no-one has anything left to say and the next Hillandale will be nothing but blank pages.

Sometimes a sudden influx of contributions keeps the supply topped up for several months, but at others there seems to be nothing to occupy the twenty or so pages of text that make up most of an issue. Such is the state of affairs at present, and so it is that I must once again ask for articles and letters, long or short. Questions 'Why' or 'When' or 'How' are excellent, and have the advantage that they require no knowledge on the part of the sender. (I know many are put off writing for the magazine by the thought that they have nothing to say.) They also have the advantage that they lead to answers which help to fill the next issue; there is a tremendous amount of knowledge lurking out there among our members, but it takes someone to ask a question before anyone thinks of mentioning the answer. Often, the person who knows the answer assumes it is universally known or just plain obvious, until he or she sees the question being asked.

Illustrations are always needed, but there is an additional problem here, for of the relatively few illustrations that are sent in with articles, many are unsuitable for reproduction. Colour photographs come out like a smoking bonfire in a nocturnal fog, and photostats of photographs or half-tone reproductions are similarly useless on the whole. Good quality photostats, taken from line drawings or engravings, are fine (as are the originals, of course), and so are good black and white photographs. Many of the articles we publish are crying out for illustrations, so if you can, please try and find something suitable if you are writing an article. On the other hand, do not be put off writing simply because you have no illustrations, and bear in mind that the Editorial library can sometimes come up trumps. Do remember, also, that the Editor has a strange dislike of letter-writing, which seems to grow ever more intense as the years go by, and any attempt to engage him in correspondence is, sadly, likely to founder.

## ARSC NEWS

The Association for Recorded Sound Collections is holding its 20th Annual Conference at the Lincoln Center in New York City on April 17-19. Our own Joe Pengelly will be among the many speakers, discussing Lioret cylinders. Participants ('attendees' the press release calls them, thus murdering both the French and English languages at once) will be able to tour the Edison National Historic Site, among other institutions.

The ARSC also announce that they have been awarded a research grant for a study of audio preservation, conservation and restoration. It will publish a bibliography and glossary of "essential elements involved in audio preservation. Recommendations for preservation standards and priorities will be developed for selection of media, methodology, technical and substantive needs, and staff training." I hope you call follow that: it seems a far cry from our own glimpses into audio preservation (i.e. looking after old records), with washing up liquid, lavatory paper and airing cupboards proving so indispensable. Can methodology mend cracked cylinders, I wonder?



# HOMOPHONE IN BRITAIN

by Frank Andrews

## PART 3

As mentioned at the end of the last instalment, in May 1928 a new 10-inch Homochord series with a plum and gold label appeared. Only nine records were made in this series by The Gramophone Company, because on June 13th they made their last pressing for British Homophone. Their highest numbered 10-inch Homochord was D.1274., and their highest numbered 12-inch, HD.2175. This was the last 12-inch Homochord to be issued.

The year 1928 also brought an event which at the time seemed to have more to do with our own Society than it did with British Homophone. It occurred on 17th March when a new company came into being in London, at 110 Cannon Street, with a capital of 400,000 ten-shilling shares and 1,300,000 one-shilling deferred shares. The company was Gramophone Records Ltd. Its business was to produce and market an improved electrically-recorded disc which, size for size, would play for twice the duration of any other disc on the market. The inventor was Adrian Sykes.

Adrian F. Sykes was, it so happens, the first President of the City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society. He had invented the "Sykes" microphone, then manufactured under licence by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company and in use at all B.B.C. stations. Gramophone Records Ltd. acquired a licence for his new process. They appointed him Technical Adviser, and agreed to pay him a royalty of one-eighth of a penny for each disc made and sold, with a minimum of £5,000 in the first year and £7,500 each year thereafter.\* The records were to be made by Ebonestos Insulators Ltd., of Excelsior Works, Rollins Street, London S.E.15. A showroom, warehouse and recording studio were to be established, until which time Sykes' own studio would be used. The Company forecast a sale of ten million records per annum and a profit of £125,000 in the first year's trading. Contracts with staff and prominent artists were signed on March 20th, and the Company received its Certificate to commence business on March 22nd. Sykes became a Director on June 26th. Recording was in the hands of Percy J. Packman, who opened a recording studio at 85a Kilburn High Road on May 21st, and began prototype recording in July. The 10-inch discs were vertical-cut, and had 220 threads per inch instead of the 80 threads usual on lateral cut discs.

The share issue was already over-subscribed when Gramophone Records Ltd. held its statutory meeting on July 16th. The shareholders were given a full account of the new record, which had yet to go into commercial production, but already it was being said that there might be a merger with another record company. This came to pass on October 28th, when Gramophone Records Ltd. merged with the British Homophone Company, who quickly brought the Kilburn High Road studios into use. The merger became a take-over on November 23rd, when Gramophone Records Ltd. resolved to wind up its affairs. Its assets, goodwill and patents were all acquired by British Homophone, as were its trade-marks, whether granted or applied for, including REX, GREX, LINGA LONGA and TAL (They Are Longer). The winding-up dragged on for three years, delayed by court actions brought by sundry contractors, advertising agents, artists and employees. At the time of the merger in October, British Homophone stopped advertising in the trade press, and did not re-start until March 1929. No monthly supplements were issued in September, October and November 1928, as there were no new recordings in those months.



## BRITISH HOMOPHONE GOES PUBLIC

The British Homophone Company which took over Gramophone Records Ltd. was not quite the same body as it had been at the beginning of the year. On May 19th 1928 the company, having resolved to turn itself into a Public Limited Company, was bought from William Sternberg, along with all the assets and goodwill of his Sterno Manufacturing Company, in return for £37,500 worth of shares in the new company. The excellent reputation of Homophone records (which was entirely due to their being made by somebody else, the Gramophone Company) brought forth a ready response from the public to the shares subscription offer. This was ironical since the new company (registered on May 23rd) seems to have decided against having its recordings made by the Gramophone Company. The last lot made at Hayes, on June 13th 1928, were merely the last batch to have been ordered by the old company.

Some two months after the public flotation of British Homophone, on July 28th, the Columbia Graphophone Company purchased all shares of the Homophon Company of Berlin. This had the effect of putting the new British Homophone Company in the awkward position of having their own trade-mark become the property of Columbia. In October 1928 Columbia made another purchase of shares, this time of Pathe Freres Pathephone, thus bringing into their hands ownership and control of the factory at Barry Road, Stonebridge. This factory now began producing Homochords once more, those for the December supplement being pressed from masters recorded in Kilburn or from other matrices. In the label-surrounds of these discs will be found faintly scratched dates, a Pathe practice, and the matrix numbers have a PL prefix indicating Pathe manufacture. However, this could have continued only for two months more, since the Pathe business was closed down on December 31st, Columbia having sold the factory to the British Homophone Co. Ltd. The PL prefix was changed to BL in January 1929. At that time, British Homophone had its registered office at Nos. 67 and 69 City Road, while its subsidiary, the Sterno Manufacturing Company, was at No. 19.

The "Wireless Trader" was the first periodical to mention the reintroduction of Homochords, stating in February 1929 that the line had been suspended while the company was changing over to its new factory. The last of the P.10000 plum-labelled Homochords came that month from the Stonebridge factory, and the last five sacred repertoire discs, SO.25 to S..29, went into the catalogue in December 1929. At least another 22 Homochords were issued but there seem to have been no issues after February 1930.

The same February 1929 edition of the Wireless Trader had also announced the introduction of a new disc, the 10-inch Sterno Record, to be sold at 1/6d. The first of these new red-and-gold labelled Sternos bore no manufacturer's name, but by the end of the year the maker's name appeared around the upper edge of the label. The early ones were made in the Stonebridge factory by Pathe employees, the matrices being prefixed SP.1 to SP.12. The 'P' was dropped when British Homophone took over the factory. The catalogue series began at S.100, duplicating the 1926 series of Sternos.

Two trade-marks covering machines and records were submitted for registration in March 1929: FORUM and SOLAR, and then three more in the autumn: THE STERNO, TROJAN AND TRICHORD, and TROJAN: MADE IN ENGLAND: ELECTRICAL RECORDING. In October 1920 STERNET and COMPASS were submitted.

At the end of its first financial year the new British Homophone Company had made a net loss of £29,577, and at the end of the second year it showed another, of £4,493. At the Annual General Meeting it was decided to close down all the provincial depots except Birmingham and Liverpool, together with the Shaftesbury Avenue showrooms,



which had once been Pathe's but which British Homophone had reopened as their own. The end of the second financial year showed that Sterno Manufacturing had also made a loss, but that Ebonestos Insulators Ltd. (now under the control of British Homophone) had made a profit.

On January 30th 1930 Adrian Sykes had been elected to the Board of British Homophone, but he resigned in August. The following year he brought a claim for minimum royalties due to him under his agreement with Gramophone Records Ltd. (still in liquidation), whose contracts British Homophone had acquired. The action was settled out of court on 15th June 1931, British Homophone paying Sykes "a substantial sum" in lieu of the £7,500 claimed.

### SOLEX

In September 1930, with a patent applied for, the company introduced a fine-groove 8-inch disc named Solex. It was to play for as long as a normal 10-inch disc and it sold for 1/3d. The first list contained twelve records, with an un-prefixed catalogue series, and matrix numbers prefixed 'L' (for 'Long Playing?'). In December, with 39 discs in the catalogue, the records were reduced to 1/- each. The matrices were put out to contract work for Selfridge's, these being sold under the name "Silvertone".

Innovations during 1930 included a change of name from Sterno Record to **STERNO ELECTRICAL RECORDING**, and the addition of the word Serial to the catalogue number. Special Scottish and Irish repertoires had been recorded, the Irish Sternos being given their own 'IR' prefixed catalogue number series.

### 12-INCH STERNO ELECTRICAL RECORDING

For the first four months of 1931 British Homophone had only the 10-inch Sternos and the 8-inch Solex records, but of the latter, No. 72 proved to be the highest number to have been issued by April. However, May saw the introduction of a new series, the 12-inch **STERNO ELECTRICAL RECORDING**. They were put into a Serial Number series beginning at 8001, and given magenta and gold labels, sometimes described as red and gold or purple and gold. They sold for 2/6d. A separate series of sacred repertoire Sternos was begun in November 1931, Serial numbers SR.001 to SR.003. The company was also producing records for the French market.

At the Radiolympia Exhibition in July 1932 British Homophone, besides displaying its own Sterno and Forum gramophones and the Mayfair Electric gramophones (for which it was the sole agent) also showed radio receivers of its own make.

### THE FOUR-IN-ONE RECORD

In August 1932 a new type of record was put on sale, the **FOUR-IN-ONE**. It carried four full-length recordings, two to each side of a 10-inch disc. This was made possible by means of a finer-cut spiral, having more threads per inch than standard discs. The labels were blue and gold, the outer edge being marked as a stroboscope for checking the speed, a feature first used on the 8-inch Solex records. Uniquely, the first record in this series was numbered 00, followed by 01. No. 03 was different from the other Four-in-Ones, in that only one work occupied both sides; the symphonic foxtrot "Samum". The label was printed "Long Play Record". Another new feature of these records was that they were planned to be issued one per week, to sell at 1/6d.



About this time, the STERNO ELECTRICAL RECORDING LABEL was replaced with a new label called simply STERNO. This also had a stroboscopic edge, but not "speed 78", which had appeared on the previous label. The stroboscope was to be a feature of all labels from then on.

### KID-KORD RECORD

The trade-marks KID-KORD and KINDAKORD were submitted for registration in November 1932, and the first of the Kid-Kord 8-inch records were introduced the following month. Six were sold in a blue album for 4/6d. This first set consisted of Nursery Rhymes, the labels bearing strongly-coloured pictures illustrating the repertoire. It was followed by a set of six in a red album, the records being about zoo animals, which were depicted on the labels. The Kid-Kord matrices were used to press "NURSERY RECORDINGS" for a (so-far) unidentified proprietor or contractor.

In December 1932 word was circulating that Four-in-One records (which were restricted to dance music) were to have a companion series offering a wider repertoire and selling at 2/-, but none ever appeared so far as I can discover.

### HARD TIMES

On July 25th 1931 the registered office of the company had been moved to the Barry Road factory as an economy measure, and the following month the Kilburn High Road studios had been mortgaged as security for money owed to the Midland Bank. A year later £6,000 was raised by mortgage debentures on the freehold of the Barry Road property, and another £20,000 on the Rollins Street factory of British Homophone's associated company, Ebonestos Insulators Ltd. At this time most recording companies began defending the copyright of their records, issuing warnings, and bringing prosecutions against those playing the records in public without paying a fee. British Homophone was one company which offered licences for public performance: extra income from whatever source was now very welcome.

By January 1933 British Homophone's business was so unpromising that its 5-shilling shares were quoted at 3d. In an effort to increase sales, Sternos had been reduced to 1/3d. The labels began to bear warnings and exhortations: "Not to be sold below the price fixed by the patentees" appeared from late Autumn 1932, and "Not to be publicly performed about December. In June 1933, with its shares down to 3½d., the company introduced two new series of records. One was the 8-inch PLAZA, with a magenta-and-gold label. Like the Solex records it played as long as a normal 10-inch disc and it sold at 6d, offering competition to the 6d. records sold by Woolworths. (British Homophone products were then being stocked by British Home Stores.) The first issues were numbered P.101 to P.106. The other new record was a 10-inch STERNO which played as long as a normal 12-inch disc. It was put into a 5,000 catalogue series, given another magenta-and-gold label, and sold at 2/-. The repertoire was light music.

During the year more money was raised by debentures charged against Homophone, Sterno and Ebonestos properties. In August 1933, after only fifty different issues, the Four-in-One label was discontinued.

*(To be concluded*

\* A most interesting and amusing account of Gramophone Records Ltd. and our first President will be found in HILLDALE No. 95, April 1977, written by Frank Andrews.



CORRESPONDENCE

Exeter, January 15 1986

Dear Mr. Proudfoot,

For some years I have had the following record:

Gramophone Co. Ltd. G.C. 4-2123, Widdicombe Fair

Mr. Charles Tree. London. Baritone with piano

(Matrix) 12442e. (My interpretation is circa 1910, Will Gaisberg.)

Recently I acquired another of the same title, but slightly different in the rendering:

double-sided (E 94), single-face no. also 4-2123, matrix HO 1522ab (circa 1912, Hancox). (Reverse side Ho 1630ab)

I am puzzled as to why the Company should have made a new recording within two or three years of a ballad of this title which surely was not selling so rapidly to require a new matrix? Could a Member offer an explanation of this?

Eric Whiteway

Rydal, Pa. U.S.A., January 27 1986

Dear Christopher,

I've been enjoying G.W.Taylor's recent articles on Vitaphone history, which has also been a special interest of mine for several years. I would like to add that their output of short films far exceeded any of the other studios, and encompassed a broad range of performers. Many of these included recording artists such as Billy Jones and Ernest Hare (The Happiness Boys), Irving and Jack Kaufman, Frank Crumit, Jack Norworth and Irene Franklin. Unfortunately, very few of these films are in circulation. This is due, in part, to the deterioration of the nitrate film, separation of disc and film, and neglect by the studios to preserve anything that was not saleable.

There were many attempts to synchronize sound and film before Vitaphone. One such effort was Webb's Electrical Pictures, of which mention is made in Harry Geduld's BIRTH OF THE TALKIES. A collector recently showed me a programme of these films, dated the week of May 11, 1914. The presentation was given at the Fulton Theatre, 46th Street, West of Broadway, in New York. Here is the programme listing:

WEBB'S ELECTRICAL PICTURES  
Vaudeville, Grand Opera and Minstrels

1. Florida Rag
2. Fiddle Dee Dee
3. William Tell
4. Who Killed Bill Bailey?
5. Casey at the Bat .....DeWolf Hopper
6. Oh, Mr. McPherson
7. Let's Make a Night of it
8. Old Oaken Bucket .....Nat Wills
9. Down Deep Within the Cellar
10. Xmas Eve in the Barracks



## Grand Opera

### Pagliacci

Tonio  
Nedda  
Canio

W. Rossini  
Eily Barnato  
Pilade Sinagra

1. Prologue, Part 2
2. Opening Chorus
3. Bird Song
4. I Know That You Hate Me
5. Vesti La Giubba
6. Harlequin Serenade
7. Behold Her
8. Non Son
9. Finale

### Minstrels

1. Opening Chorus
2. Patter, Introducing "Get Out and Get Under"
3. Get Out and Get Under
4. Patter, introducing "Whistling Jim"
5. Whistling Jim
6. Patter, Introducing "Slippery Slide"
7. Slippery Slide
8. Patter, Introducing "Johnson's Swear Story"
9. Closing Chorus

Note that the performer's names are not listed except for two in the Vaudeville section, and the cast of the Grand Opera. I am not familiar with the singers in the Grand Opera section, but the two names listed under Vaudeville are quite prominent. DeWolfe Hopper appeared in silent films as well as some early sound shorts. Nat Wills, on the other hand, was primarily a vaudevillian and did not make other films of which I am aware. Although there is no description of the apparatus, I would assume it to be a disc-film operation.

David Goldenberg

## VITAPHONE DISCS AND FILMS

Still on the subject of Vitaphone, Frank Holland writes from the Piano Museum in Brentford High St., Middlesex, that he has some 16-inch discs for playing on a projector he has like that shown in October Hillandale (No. 146, P. 261), but not the films. On the other hand, he has some films without the discs, and if anyone else is in a similar position, he would like to hear from them with a view to marrying up some pairs on an exchange basis. He also recalls that his uncle, Cecil Holland, was a prominent make-up artist in the golden age of the cinema, with John Barrymore and Warner Oland among his clients.



# A VISIT TO THE NATIONAL SOUND ARCHIVE

by Tony Swain

During a holiday in London, I thought I would pay a visit to Britain's National Sound Archive (formerly the British Institute of Recorded Sound). This is now part of the British Library. The Archive is housed at 29 Exhibition Road in South Kensington, not far from the Science Museum. This collection of recordings on cylinder and disc should be of great interest to members of the C.L.P.G.S.

During the thirty-six years of the Archive's existence, every phase of the development of recorded sound from wax cylinders to compact disc is represented. The Archive consists of around half a million discs of all kinds and over 35,000 hours of recorded tape. There is also a unique collection of non-commercial cylinders, some dating back to 1890.

Among the treasures to be found in this collection are Brahms playing his first Hungarian Dance, Debussy accompanying Mary Garden on the piano in excerpts from 'Pelleas et Melisande'. Of course all types of music are included in the collection, but in the main classical recordings seem to predominate.

The Archive also holds a great collection of BBC programmes, both on tape, which they record themselves, and in the form of BBC transcription discs. There is also a comprehensive reference library. This consists of record company catalogues, discographies and reference works such as Brian Rust's 'The Victor Master Book' (1969). Biographies of recording stars are also included, two examples being Harry Lauder's 'A Minstrel in France' (1918) and Maggie Teyte's 'A Star on my Door' (1958). On microfilm can be found runs of the Talking Machine News, the early British trade paper, and the American Talking Machine World.

The reference library is open to the public, without appointment, from 10.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday, with late opening on Thursdays to 9 p.m. There is a free listening service available of virtually any recording in the archive by appointment only from 10.30 to 5.30 Monday to Friday, again with late opening to 9 p.m. on Thursday.

A current project of the N.S.A. is the formation of a National Directory of recorded sound collections, a listing of every public or private organisation in Britain which contains sound recordings with valuable material. If any members of the Society know of any such collections, please send your information to Jeremy Silver, Research Officer, The British Library National Sound Archive, 29 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AS. (Telephone: 01 - 589 6603).

\*\*\*\*\*

## MAY MEETING

The MAY meeting at Bloomsbury, on the 27th of that month, will see the Editor presenting a cylinder programme. Not a portable, or any gramophone, in sight; the fare will be mainly operatic, and will be played acoustically, mainly on an Idelia phonograph which is due to be sold at South Kensington in the following week.



# Concert Coin-Op

It is not often that one comes across a coin-operated phonograph designed to play Concert cylinders (in fact, coin-slot phonographs of any sort are scarce enough), and on the centre pages we show some photographs of such a machine. It was only when it was lit for these photographs (taken specially for HILLANDALE shortly before it was sold at South Kensington some time back) that the trace of the name 'Excelsior' was seen on the front of the straight edge. Excelsior phonographs are familiar to many collectors in their cheaper forms, based on the Type Q Graphophone, and are recognisable by their red lining and 'EWC' monogram, but neither of these features was present in this instance.

It was a duplex machine, designed to play standard cylinders as well as Concert, and another unusual feature was the tapered mandrel shaft, enabling the standard mandrel to be removed. Presumably, the Concert mandrel (and, perhaps, a Pathe Salon size) fitted directly on to this shaft in place of the standard one, rather than fitting over it as on the Columbia AB or Edison Bell Duplex, among others. Unfortunately, the large mandrel was no longer present, so that this could not be verified.

The coin mechanism was present and correct (another unusual feature), and the following is an explanation of its working, with reference to the four photographs reproduced in the centre page spread.

When a coin is dropped into the slot, it hits the end of a detent below the bedplate, which releases the motor and also lowers the lifting bar A, allowing the reproducer to be lowered on to the record. As the reproducer carrier arm is driven along by the feed-screw in the normal manner, a leather belt B is unwound from a pulley C. The end of the belt is fixed to an eccentric D, mounted on the carrier arm and riding on the straight-edge. A pin projects from the face of the eccentric, and at the end of the record strikes the upright post E, which is adjustably mounted on the bar F. At the left hand end of F is a cam G, the shaped rear face of which bears against the end of the spindle of pulley C. This spindle is spring loaded to keep it in contact with the cam, and at its rearmost end is a bevelled gear H. When cam G forces the spindle rearwards, this gear engages a worm on the mandrel shaft, which causes the gear H and the pulley C to rotate anti-clockwise.

This re-winds the leather belt B, causing the eccentric D to rotate and thus lift the carrier arm. Once the eccentric has reached the extent of its movement, the continued re-winding of the belt pulls the entire carrier arm (now free of the feedscrew) back to the start position. Here, the pin on the eccentric hits a second post on bar F, pushing the cam away from the end of the pulley/gear spindle so that the gear disengages from the worm and the pulley is once more free to unwind the belt as the next cylinder is played.

In spite of its somewhat Heath Robinson-like design, the mechanism was well made and would probably have given reliable service. The lower part of the case, containing the motor and the coin-box, was enclosed by a door (removed for the photograph). It seems to be unnecessarily large, with much wasted space. Perhaps the idea was to impress potential customers with sheer size.

C.P.



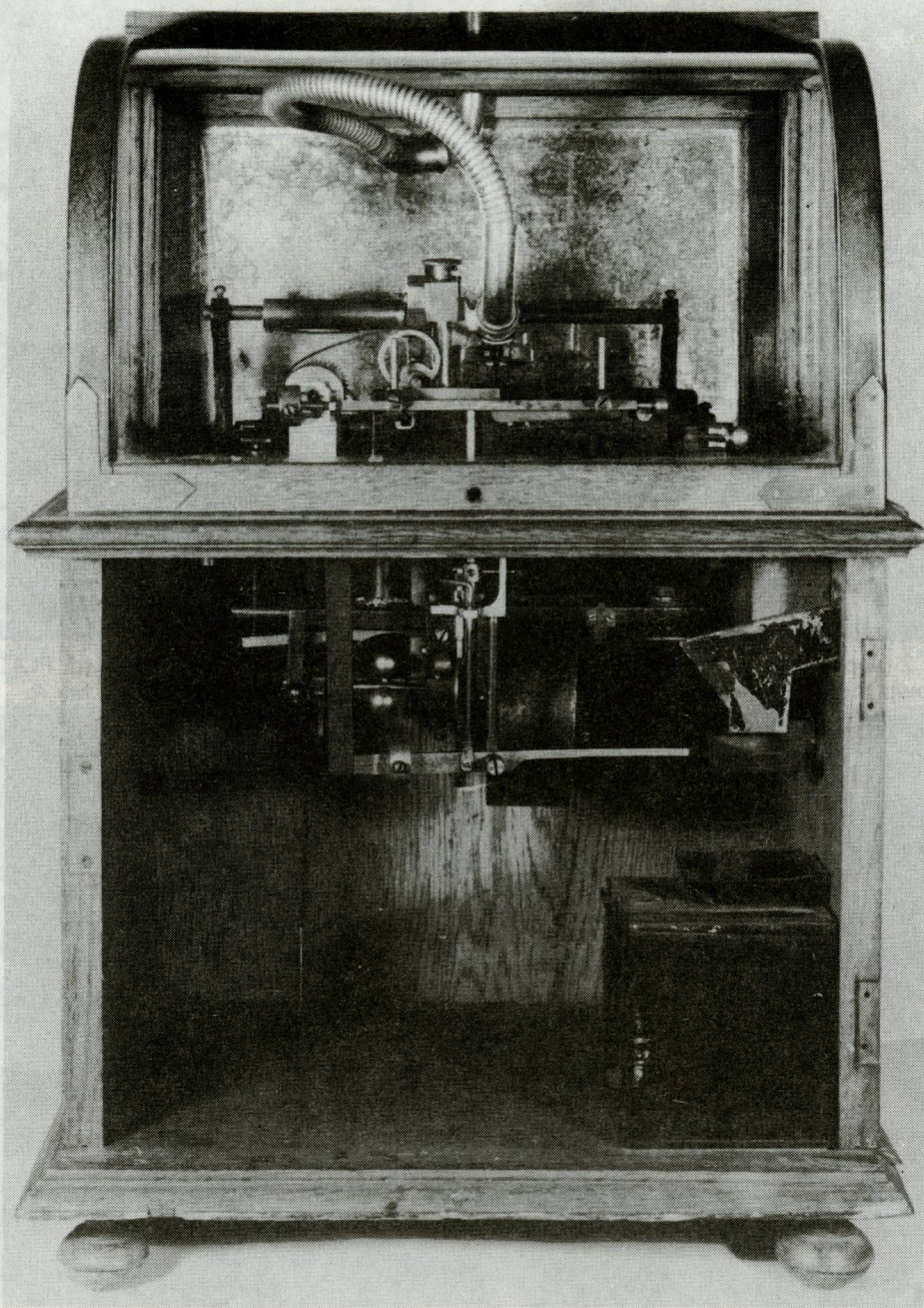


PLATE 1: Front view of the Excelsior duplex coin-slot machine.



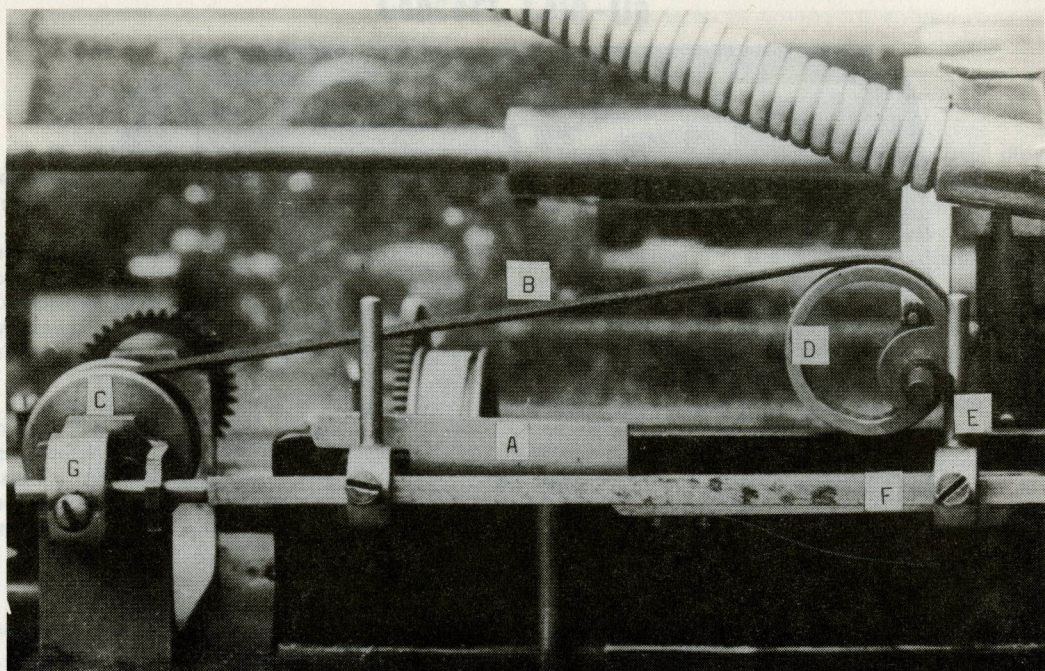


PLATE 2 (above): the eccentric D is lifting the carrier arm, at the end of the record. PLATE 3 (below): the eccentric returning to the start, with the pin resting on the lifting bar A.

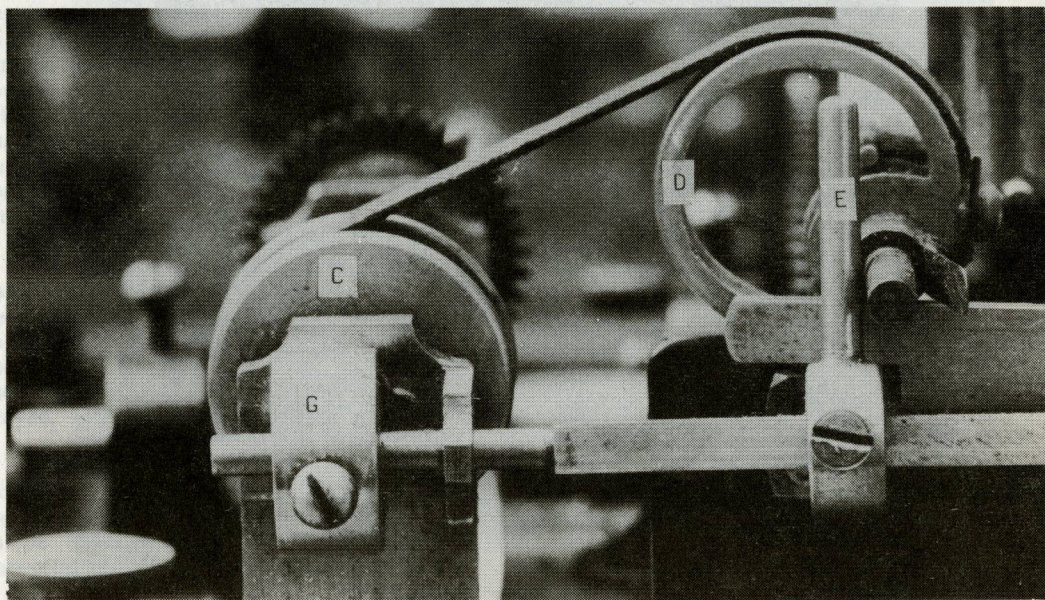


PLATE 3: Front view of the Excessor duplex coin-sort machine.



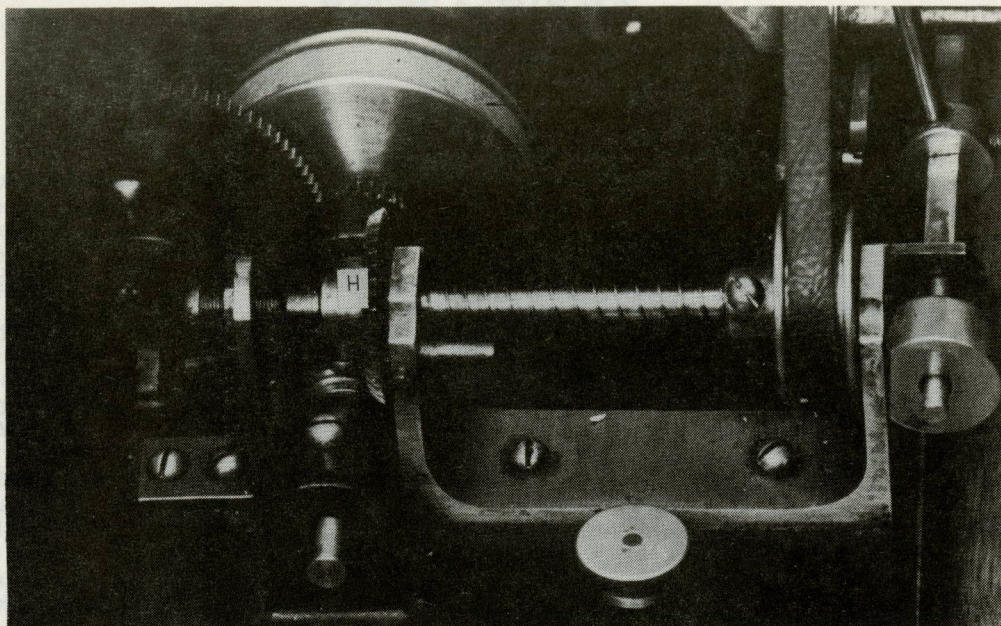
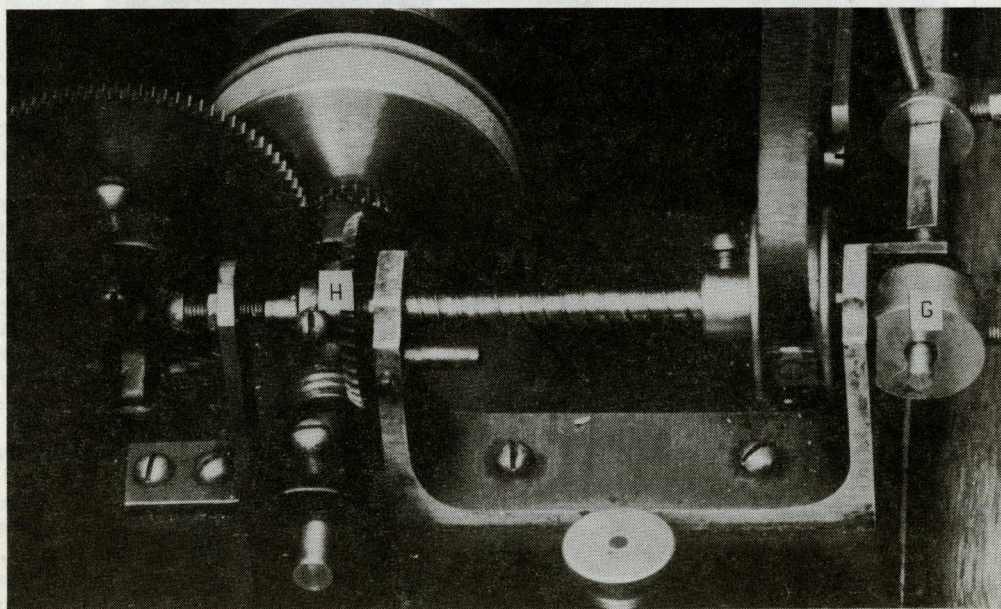


PLATE 4 (above): Pulley C is being turned by the belt as the record is played. PLATE 5 (below): Pulley C is being turned back by gear H, now engaging the worm on the mandrel shaft.





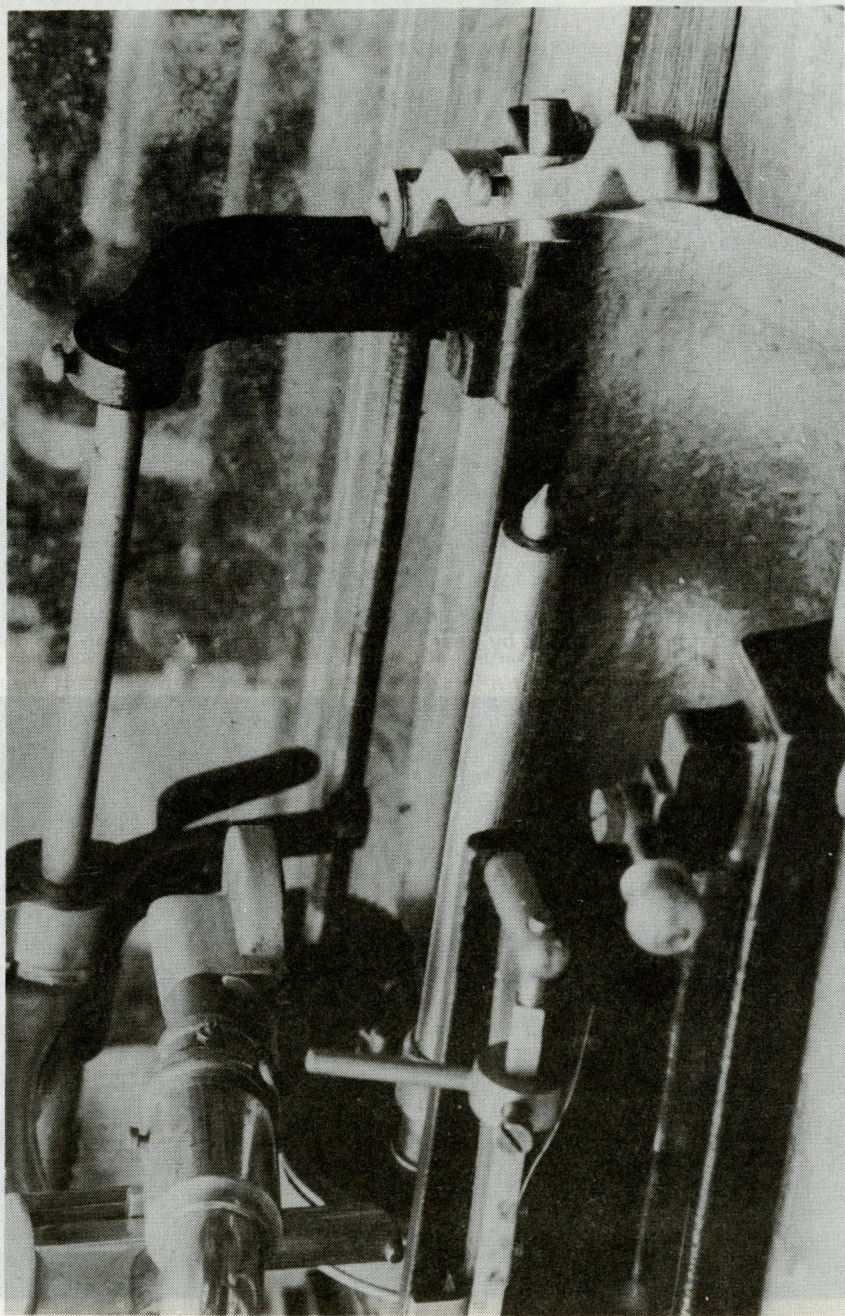


PLATE 6: view of the mandrel shaft with both mandrels removed



## STARTING A COLLECTION

Bill Clark

For Christmas, my kind wife gave me the collector's ideal present: a complete set of back numbers of the Hillandale. Looking through these old issues I was interested to read a series entitled 'Starting a Collection'. In these, members described how they came to be collectors and related a few personal reminiscences. I liked the idea, and thought it might be good to revive it.

My first memories of recorded music date back to early childhood. At this time I lived with my parents and a grandparent in a house in East London. My grandmother had a cabinet gramophone which on special occasions I was allowed to operate. I particularly liked listening to records of Sandy Powell. The one I mainly remember was Sandy the M.P.

When I started at secondary school, a friend of the family gave me a black HMV 101. I can still remember proudly bringing it home on the bus, together with some Gracie Fields records. At that time (in 1961) it was still possible to buy steel needles in the local record shop. I was fortunate also that so many people at that time had gone over to microgrooves, and many 78s were available at local jumble sales. After a time, with Saturday afternoons spent queuing for sales in local church halls, I had obtained a good selection of 1950s records, together with some representative samples of earlier eras.

With exams and other interests my record collecting came to a halt, only to be re-awakened five years ago with a move to Suffolk. One day I visited a local sale room and noticed in the catalogue an Edison Bell Gem. Examination of this item revealed that apart from a partially stripped gear and no reproducer or horn, the phonograph was complete. Accordingly I went to the auction the next day and made the purchase. I had attended the 1977 CLPGS exhibition in London, and was thus aware of the Society, and was able to secure both reproducer and horn. By judicious filing the stripped gear was cured and with the aid of a cylinder picked up some ten years before, but never played, the phonograph sprang back into life.

From that moment, my interest was rekindled. I began to keep a lookout in likely shops and auction rooms. A collection of machines and records soon began to mount. In one interesting antique shop which I visited I saw an Aeolian Vocalion, complete with its Graduola tone control. While I was bargaining over this, I espied in the back of the poorly lit shop a large cabinet with winding handle at the side. I asked what this was and the shop owner replied that it was a gramophone which he used to have in his house but which his wife had turned out because it did not fit in with the furnishings. When I opened the lid, I found it was an HMV 192, with gilt fittings, needle tins and record dusters. I made an offer which was accepted, and brought the items home.

My wife shared the previous owner's spouse's opinion of the cabinet, and so the machine was banished to the loft. While playing records on the 192, which you may recall has a saxophone horn, I was rather disappointed with the volume and tone. Thinking that the soundbox was defective, I tried the one from my portable, but there was no improvement. I pondered on this for some weeks until one evening it came into my head that perhaps some one had silenced this machine by stuffing something into the horn. By wriggling my hand through the slats at the front, I was able to reach down the horn. I



reached the bend and, yes, there was something there. I felt around and pulled out a brown paper bag. Excitedly I wondered what could be inside. I opened the bag and there before me were photographs of a courting couple, probably taken during the war. What is more, I recognised the face of the man. It was none other than the dealer who had sold me the gramophone. Some days later, I took the photographs back to the owner, and when he saw them a look of embarrassment came over his face. Apparently, his wife had put the photos there as a safe place out of the way of the children. Anyway, the gramophone now worked in a much more efficient and melodious way.

On another occasion, I was driving down an unfamiliar road in a local town, keeping an eye out for likely shops. I noticed one establishment which had a large cabinet with an open lid in the window. Leaving my family in town to do their shopping I retraced my steps to the shop and found another large cabinet gramophone with double doors at the front. Under the watchful gaze of the proprietor, I wound up the machine and put on a record. Even though the doors of the machine were closed, I could tell that this was no ordinary gramophone. When the doors were opened, a veil was lifted, as they say in modern hi-fi parlance. It was, of course, a Re-entrant model, a 194 in fact. I was quite excited by this prospect, and then came the question - How much?

Much to my amazement, the dealer quoted me a price in dollars. Now we live quite near to a U.S. airbase and apparently most of the trade of this shop is done with visiting servicemen. When I asked the price in English pounds, a sense of patriotism came over the man and I was given a much more reasonable figure. So maybe there is a tip here for the American reader; when in England, ask a native to do your buying. The 194 is to my mind much more elegant than the 192, and it is now my main acoustic machine and lives in the sitting room.

My tip to starting a collection is not to become dispirited. Often I have spent a long time looking for things and not finding any of interest. Then, just as you are about to give up, something appears out of the blue: yes, even Blue Amberols!

## Correspondence

Bacchus Marsh, Australia

Dear Sir,

With reference to Page 310 of the February issue, the slot machine, here in Australia in pre-1945 war years each railway station had a very similar machine made of cast iron which dispensed tablets of chocolate at one penny a go. With the war and the rise in price of chocolate, these machines were removed. I do not know where they went; presumably, they were the property of the chocolate company, and probably went for scrap.

The HMV and the placard below could have been added at a later date, as it was altered to sell a dearer product of some kind.

Ben Betts

I suspect that the needle flap and the '2d.' label have been added quite recently, after the machine went out of service. The '2' looks suspiciously like the reproduction signs you get in souvenir shops - Ed.



# Vitaphone

## PART 3: THE OPERATIC SHORT FILMS

by G.W.Taylor

Previous articles (Hillandale 144 and 146) gave a technical description of the Vitaphone sound-on-disc film sound system, and described the first Vitaphone programmes and their critical reception. This last article is concerned with the operatic shorts and the singers (many of whom are familiar to record collectors), who made them.

Of the many hundreds of Vitaphone shorts produced between 1926 and 1930, about forty-six were by opera singers.<sup>1</sup> Of these, I have traced evidence for up to thirty-two. Martinelli is known to have made twelve, perhaps all in 1926 and 1927. Gigli is reported to have made five by May 1927;<sup>2</sup> Marion Talley, three and possibly four (two with Gigli); Charles Hackett and John Charles Thomas, at least three each; Mary Lewis, two; Anna Case, Amato, Schumann-Heink, Werrenrath and John Barclay, at least one each. It seems likely that most of these were made in the first year or two of Vitaphone, 1926-8.

Giovanni Martinelli (1885 - 1969) is easily the winner with twelve to his credit; the enthusiastic critical reception of the first releases, described in the previous article, probably accounts for this. Martinelli was a leading tenor at the Metropolitan Opera from 1913 to 1946. Collins states that most of his shorts were filmed in the old Manhattan Opera House, sometime after operations started in April 1926; the Manhattan was abandoned as unsuitable in 1927. Accompaniment for most of the shorts was by the Vitaphone Orchestra, a pickup group conducted by Herman Heller; this was used for the other Met. stars as well, apparently.

Martinelli filmed twenty-three pieces, listed below:

### A) Operatic

1. Aida: Si, corre voci ... Celeste Aida, with Adamo Didur
2. Aida: Se quel guerrier ... Celeste Aida
3. Aida: L'abborrita rival ... Gia i sacerdoti, with Ina Bourskaya
4. Carmen: Halte-la ... Je vais dancier ... La Fleur, with Jeanne Gordon
5. Faust: Prison Scene, with Yvonne Bourdin and Louis d'Angelo
6. La Juive (Halevy): Rachel! quand du Seigneur la grace tutelaire
7. La Juive: Ta fille en ce moment ..., with Louis d'Angelo
- 8-10. Martha: Qui sola vergin rosa / M'appari / Il mio rimorso, with Lydia Maracci
11. Pagliacci: Vesti la giubba
12. Il Trovatore: Act 3, Scene 2, leading to Di quella pira, with Lydia Maracci and unnamed tenor

### B) Songs

13. Because (d'Hardelot)
14. Cammina Morelo (Italian folk song)



15. Estrellita (Ponce)
16. Homing (del Rigo)
17. Love's Garden of Roses (?Haydn Wood)
18. Nina (Tanara)
19. Ochre chornye (Russian folk song)
20. Pavu real (Mexican folk song)
21. Song of Songs (Moyat)
22. Ssakegy kislany (Hungarian folk song)
23. Torna a Surriento (de Curtis)

The three Martha arias were grouped as shown in one film. The popular songs were filmed in groups of three or four, under a title such as "The Ship's Concert" or just "Martinelli No. 2". Items 19 and 22, together with an English and an Italian song, were grouped together in a film entitled "Gipsy Caravan".<sup>3</sup>

Notes on the singers (from Kutsch and Riemans):

Adamo Didur (1874-1946), bass, at the Met. from 1908 to 1933  
 Ina Bourskaya (1888-1954), alto, at the Met. from 1922 to 1937  
 Jeanne Gordon (1893-1952), alto, at the Met. from 1919 to about 1928  
 Louis d'Angelo (1888-1958), bass, at the Met. from 1917 to 1946  
 (Yvonne Bourdin and Lydia Maracci, no entry).

The following comments on the Martinelli Vitaphones are taken from Collins' article:<sup>4</sup>  
 "The Vitaphone soundtracks find Martinelli in mostly congenial voice. The most interesting is a long section from the finale of 'Martha', which the tenor never sang on stage. His Lionel is a burly bumpkin, albeit touching and lyrical. The 'Faust' and 'La Juive' excerpts give us sections of the operas that Martinelli never recorded commercially (or in the case of 'Faust', were recorded but not released). He is in fine voice, but his colleagues are less than excellent. Of the songs, the Vitaphone 'Nina' may be the best of his renditions of it. There is a certain interest in his only recordings in Russian and Hungarian, but they and the other songs are only of interest to the completist."

The statement with regard to the 'La Juive' item, 6, is incorrect, as the aria was released, at least in Britain, on DB 865.<sup>5</sup>

A memorable evening in 1967 with Martinelli is described in Ref. 3. Among other items, the following Martinelli Vitaphones were shown (with re-recorded sound-on-film?): 1 (reported as made in 1926); 6 or 7; 3; 12; 13 and 16; 19, 22, 14 or 23; 17 or 18 or 21 (Gypsy Caravan) - that is, nearly half of the Martinelli Vitaphones. The films were reported as static, and the sound had "the continual hiss of the disc", but how the sound related to the original cinema productions is, of course, not clear.

It is interesting that the Aida item with Didur was shown. This is the opening scene of the opera where Rhadames and the Pharaoh confer before Rhadames launches into "Celeste Aida". The film seems to have been remade, omitting the initial duet part, possibly because of the need to make the shorts shorter?

The tenor Charles Hackett (1889-1942) was with the Met. from 1919 to 1922. He also sang in the leading European opera houses, and was engaged by the Chicago Opera from 1923 to 1931. From 1934 to 1940, he was again with the Met.

The Hackett Vitaphones are described in Ref. 6. The recording was done by Brunswick (who indeed were bought up by Warners in 1930). The five items are all operatic:



1. L'Africana: O Paradiso
2. Don Giovanni: Il mio tesoro
3. Rigoletto: La donna e mobile
4. Rigoletto: Questa o quella
5. Romeo et Juliette: Tomb Scene, with Rosa Bow

They are said to have been made in 1929, but Geduld says that at least one was released as early as 3 February 1927. However, it seems likely that Hackett made some of these films some time after August 1929, when he returned from a European trip (and before this, he had been singing in Chicago). He certainly mentioned making "two talkies in New York" among future plans. This might give a clue to the actual number of Vitaphone films released by Hackett - if each ran for around seven minutes, the five items above could have been reasonably encompassed in three reels.

The soprano Marion Talley (born 1906 or 1907) was the Met. sensation of 1926, making her debut as Gilda in "Rigoletto" on 17th February. She made several records at the time, which reveal a brilliant coloratura voice, and she had a presentable appearance. Nevertheless, her career did not bear out this initial promise, and she stayed on the Met. register for only a few years. However, in 1926, she was on the crest of the wave, and it is not surprising that she was asked to appear in Vitaphone shorts, one of which, "Caro Nome" (inevitably) was in the very first programme.

The critical reception of this film, described in the previous article, was not very favourable, attention being drawn particularly to the singer's articulation and facial expressions. Nevertheless, Talley appeared in several more Vitaphones, the following of which I have traced:

1. Caro Nome (6 August 1926)
2. Rigoletto Quartet, with Gigli, de Luca and Jeanne Gordon (3 February 1927)
3. Another solo item? (3 February 1927)<sup>7</sup>
4. Another with Gigli? (before May 1927)<sup>2,8</sup>

The Rigoletto quartet was more favourably received than the Caro Nome, at least partly because the sound was better,<sup>9</sup> and possibly because close-ups of Talley were avoided?

Guiseppe de Luca (1876-1950), a leading baritone of the day, sang at the Met. for thirty years starting in 1915.

The celebrated tenor Beniamino Gigli (1890-1957) assumed the world stage in 1920, when he made his Scala debut in Boito's "Mefistofele". He sang at the Met. between 1921 and 1931 and also in 1938-9. He was a star attraction in 1926, when he was invited to make Vitaphone shorts. According to Variety, he had made five by May 1927. The following have been traced:

1. Cavalleria Rusticana, solo with Bernardo de Pace (mandolin)<sup>9</sup>
2. Pearl Fishers, duet with de Luca<sup>10</sup>
3. Rigoletto quartet, with Talley, de Luca and Jeanne Gordon
4. La Giaconda, arias<sup>11</sup>
5. Duet with Talley<sup>8</sup>

The Pearl Fishers duet film was shown during the Martinelli evening in 1967. It was said that "sound and vision kept losing each other, due, we are told, to shrinkage of the original negative". The poor sound quality of this film, relative to that of gramo-



phone records of the late twenties, was particularly noted, but this may, of course be a consequence of age.

With regard to Gigli's first Vitaphone, Walker quotes Variety on another pitfall of these early sound films: "As Gigli ends his Cavalleria solo to a little applause, he walks upstage to join the ensemble, this creating what is nothing more than a wait. As the audience is wondering what it's about, or (what) the trouble (is), Gigli turns and walks to the footlights to take a bow, to no applause and only giggles by that time".

The soprano Mary Lewis (1897-1941) started as a popular singer, but later gained operatic experience in Europe, before making her Met debut, as Mimi in La Boheme, on January 28th 1926, about three weeks before Talley's. The critics were impressed with her appearance, less so with her voice. She appeared occasionally at the Met. over the next few years - indeed, she outlasted Talley - but the 1929/30 season was her last.

There is little on her Vitaphone activities in the Record Collector article (Ref 13) I used for her career. However, the following anecdote apparently dates to 1927. An abridged version (presumably one or more shorts) of Tales of Hoffmann, with Mary Lewis, was being filmed by Vitaphone in the Manhattan Opera House in April. The heating had failed. Mary sat around all day, thinly clad, waiting for her work to begin. According to Vitaphone, she drank a teacupful of Scotch, rendering her performance unuseable (but surely making entertaining cinema!). According to Mary, and various depositions, including one by Jeanne Gordon, she had had a small amount of brandy for medicinal purposes. This may be - but she was also reported to be "as drunk as a lord, staggering all over the stage", at her last Met. performance.

Mary Lewis was a beautiful woman and in 1930, she was engaged by Pathe to make a film. However, it was never completed. She had also appeared in a number of Christie Comedies about 1920.

Apart from the Tales of Hoffmann short(s) (which may never have been released), Lewis also appeared in "Lightweight Ditties of the Confederacy", released on April 24 1927 (according to Variety: Geduld says April 26).

Pasquale Amato (1878-1942), the famous baritone, sang at the Met. from 1908 to 1921. After that, he appeared in Europe and in South America, and in the late twenties and thirties, he was with various American opera companies. According to Ref. 14, he appeared in at least one Vitaphone short, copyrighted in 1928. Amato appears with an unnamed female pianist. The film is extant but the sound disc lost. Amato sings two selections: the first appears to be "Torna a Surriento" (which Martinelli also did); the second is obviously the Toreador Song from "Carmen". For the latter, the singer conveniently finds a Spanish shawl and toreador cap on the piano. The whole film is entitled "A Neapolitan Romance", and the way the pianist rolls her eyes suggests that the 'romance' would begin as soon as the camera was removed from the scene. Certainly there is little 'romance' connected with the portion which was filmed.

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 W.J.Collins, The Record Collector, 25 (1979) 187-8          | 8 Variety, June 9 1928                         |
| 2 Variety, May 18 1927  | 9 A Walker, The Shattered Silents, 1978, p. 25 |
| 3 Hillandale, 40 (1967), 176-8                                | 10 Variety, March 21 1928                      |
| 4 Ref1, p. 172  | 11 Variety, June 21 1927                       |
| 5 Opera at Home, 4th Ed., 1928                                | 12 Walker, Ref. 9, pp. 25-6                    |
| 6 The Record Collector, 22 (1975), 193, 201, 212              | 13 The Record Collector, 23 (1976), 172-191    |
| 7 H.M.Geduld, The Birth of the Talkies, Indiana, 1975, p. 151 | 14 The Record Collector, 21 (1973), 38         |



# Special Cables

## DON'T GET TIED IN KNOTS!

*Says Ivor Abelson in his expose of special cables for hi-fi speakers*

In the last few years, those whose business it is to sell to those who wish to hear recordings and broadcasts at their best, have been offering all manner of 'special' cables. Such is the sales pitch, or 'hype', that the familiar words 'cable', 'lead' or even the more basic 'wire' have been found too prosaic. Now we hear the magic buzz-word 'Interconnect', used as a noun, not even a verb. As 'interconnect' can cost more than £5 per metre, and in some cases it can cause an amplifier to run into destructive instability, the buyer needs to exercise the greatest care.

Historically, the breed was fathered by a flat type of speaker cable whose designer was concerned with neatness, not sonics, as it could be run from amplifier to speakers under the carpet without the unsightly and potentially damaging bulge caused by round speaker cables of sufficiently generous diameter for their purpose. Flat cables have very substantial capacity between the poles, also an abnormally high inductance. This, more by luck than judgement, was often of value insofar as it would bleed away much of the amplifier's feedback. As, in the interest of good figures for the copywriter, excess feedback is all too commonly used, there was a striking improvement in the clarity and life of the sound. Alternatively, the amplifier might 'blow up' and stern warnings came to be issued by amplifier manufacturers.

While the shopkeeper is, in law, liable to make good such damage (and, under our modern consumer protection legislation, he cannot by any exclusion clause wriggle out of this), it seems that very few buyers were aware of their rights in this matter. The position in law is similar to that where, for example, an enlarged cassette system was marketed and then, in a short time, supplies of the cassettes and spares and manufacturer's service dried up as there were so few buyers. However, those affected were, it seems, made aware of their right to compensation. This did not happen over the problems with the first generation of special cables.

From this inauspicious beginning, which at least produced a worthwhile improvement of sound in many cases, a generation of safe so-called 'improved' cables spawned, not only for loudspeaker connections but to connect or 'interconnect' turntable units, tape units and tuners to the amplifier and to connect pre-amp to power amp where these were separate. There are many makes at many prices, but all make the same claim, to upgrade the sound. It has gone to the extent that pick-up arms and headphones boast of special leads. Yet the one change that is obvious if the best conductivity is desired, the use of silver rather than copper, is not the usual basis of the upgrading. Alternatively an increase in effective conductivity is obtained by making the cable thicker, as in 'monster cable', yet other 'super cables' point out that their advantage comes from being thin! So the advertisers have it both ways; thick is best if you are selling thick, thin if you are selling thin! What is beyond doubt thin is the end of the wedge the customer gets.

Is there a way out for the customer? There is if the shopkeeper is prepared to do his job. A person prepared to spend many tens of pounds, possibly a three figure sum, on



a simple thing like a cable, deserves respect and assistance in line with the extent of his undertaking. Alas, many shopkeepers seem oblivious to this. Something must be very wrong, in my view, when a customer has to fight not to earn his money but to spend it!

How is the cable to be evaluated? It is not a difficult task, despite the masses of verbiage in the mass-circulation hi-fi press that says it is. In the case of speaker leads, a case can be made out for one complication, the need to use the same type of amplifier and the same type of speakers as the customer owns. This might mean a transport job or the supply of cables on a sale or return basis for home trials. For home trials, it seems fair for a call-out fee to be paid. Better spend £10 on such a fee than waste many tens of pounds on a chance purchase. With signal cables, it is hard to see how different signal sources or amplifiers will include factors that weight the choice of cable.

Having made the preliminary arrangements, all we need to do is stand the speakers side by side and use the cable under test for one and the original cable for the other. If the balance control can actually turn off, then no other switching is needed, just rock the control from side to side and see if there is any improvement from the special cable. It is perhaps best to start with a simple thick cable like QED. If improvement there is, then make this special cable the new reference and try another. It does not take long to evaluate six or even ten cables. With signal cables, if phono plugs are used, as is generally the case, it is easy to connect one channel with the special cable leaving the other with the original cable. DIN plugs are more of a problem and it may be necessary to have a hybrid lead made up, affordable to test one or two special cables, less so if a comprehensive test is to be made. A possible solution is DIN-to-phono adaptors, although it will be claimed that these will blur the sound and mark the improvement that would result from a direct connection.

In my view, a genuine upgrade would be to replace the phono or DIN plugs with Post Office (now BT) .25" jacks or, if space exists and the cost can be afforded, XLR plugs. Both are used by professionals, people incidentally who are prepared to pay out for good connections are generally not interested in cables with claimed special audio properties.

Another recent fashion in the mass circulation journals is to reject fancy speaker cables and to advise solid core leads, as are used in mains wiring. This is not expensive to buy enough to try. Solid cored mains lead is also said to be better than flex to connect the amplifier to the mains, but the effect is said to be significant only if a toroidal mains transformer is used. These are said to generate harmonics from the mains waveform which get into the amplifier to blur the sound. Solid cored cable bleeds these away to the mains.

Unless proper measures are taken, solid core wiring breaks the law but it seems that it would be lawful during careful experiment. Two switches are needed, each double pole so that there is no pulse which might unsettle the amplifier during switchover. Both cables are switched in when any change is desired. Then the cable not to be tested is switched off to permit the power to flow solely through the cable under test. If the solid cable is found to be best, then to comply with the law, the amplifier must be fixed in place, the wall socket must not be used via a plug, but a junction box installed and the cable secured with appropriate clamps at appropriate intervals.

It must be emphasised that all the foregoing is speculative, and it should never be accepted that advertiser's hype has any real meaning. However, the following wiring change is of utterly proven value if separate woofers and tweeters are used. This remains true



for the cheapest mini-box as for the best audiophile designs. It is to separate at the crossover the inputs to woofer and tweeter and to wire each back separately to the amplifier. Any competent service engineer can alter the speaker internal wiring and fit the extra terminals. If banana plugs are used at the amplifier, 'stackable' types may be bought where one plug fits piggy-back on the other. It is of course neater to fit extra sockets. If XLR speaker plugs are used, these have such a low resistance (Xtra Low Resistance = XLR) that no further plugs are needed. So far no four-way special leads are on offer and the cost of doubling up on special leads of course doubles. If any improvement was found with special leads over simple ones before using separate wiring, all the reports I have are that, once the separate wiring is adopted, then simple wire is no worse than the best of the specials.

Car spares suppliers have four-core flexible wire. If solid speaker lead is preferred, this is harder to buy. 'Three-core and earth' gives the requisite four cores. 1 square mm is usually specified, but 1.5 is also available if a heavier cable is wanted.

It must be repeated that this separation of woofer from tweeter wiring is of the greatest possible worth, and the capabilities of those who advocate expensive cables while ignoring this simple and radically effective step are open to the gravest doubt.

## Obituary

### DOUGLAS FITZPATRICK

It is with regret that we have to report the death, on January 12th, of Douglas Fitzpatrick at the age of 78. (An appropriate age for a gramophile). Douglas was famous for his enormous acoustic gramophone, built in to one of the rooms at Sheringham Hall, which has been described in past numbers of this magazine. Outside the gramophone world, he was also famous as the owner and restorer of a 1907 21-litre Metallurgique motor car. He drove this around the roads of Norfolk at illegal speeds (Jim Goodall recalls 90 m.p.h. appearing on the clock), and even that doyen of vintage car racing, the late Patrick Lindsay, found the experience interesting in view of the poor performance of Edwardian brakes. According to an obituary which appeared in the Eastern Daily Press (sent to us by Jim Goodall), Douglas Fitzpatrick had served in the R.A.F. and the Navy, and in the former capacity taught Douglas Bader to fly.

### CHARLES EDMUND RUBBRA

(May 23rd 1901 - February 14th 1986)

A Tribute by John Cavanagh.

Edmund Rubbra was born in Northampton, became a pupil of Holst and, between 1937 and the late 1970s, composed eleven symphonies, not to mention a vast range of other instrumental and vocal music.

Unfortunately, I am sure that many readers will be almost completely unaware of any of this output, although some may remember him as a fine pianist. (In fact, a BBC broadcast of piano music gave me an introduction to Rubbra's works).

Much of this obscurity is certainly due to the curious attitude of major record companies in Britain towards British composers. It is true that HMV issued a pioneering set of



Rubbra's fifth symphony in 1950, with Sir John Barbiroli conducting the Halle Orchestra. Sadly, since then the field has been left open and only small companies (such as Lyrita) have consistently championed his music.

The late Bernard Hermann recorded three Rubbra symphonies in America during the 1960s but, typically, none of these discs were ever released in the U.K. I would urge anyone who is unfamiliar with the music of Edmund Rubbra to listen to Norman Del Mar's reading of the sixth symphony. Few would fail to find a rewarding experience in the music of this neglected master.

## **LONDON MEETING**

28th January 1986

### **FAMOUS SINGERS ON PATHE AND EDISON DISCS**

Many who love to play records of great voices from the past are excluded from a great wealth of material because they have neither phono-cut discs nor the machinery with which to play them. Perhaps this explains why there was a packed house of enthusiasts for the second of Gordon Bromly's programmes featuring famous singers on Pathe and Edison discs. (The first was in May 1984). They were rewarded with a most interesting programme which included some rare records. One especially was a curiosity: a centre-start Pathe with a paper label (No. 7278: Paul Payan - "Le Chalet").

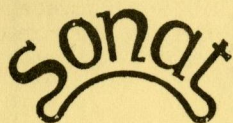
As so often when I hear recitals of early operatic records by artists whose names are legendary, I fell to wondering how it is that in among the magnificent voices there can occur the odd one or two sounding quite lacklustre to my ear. Is it my modern reaction to a style of singing now outmoded, or did these artists possess a talent or presence which the record could not capture? On this occasion there was only one singer who inspired this reflection, and I decline to confess which, for fear of bringing derision on my head. Suffice to say that my evening was otherwise one of unalloyed pleasure, with highspots being provided by, for instance, Giovanni Martinelli; Carl Nebe; two helpings of the admirably named Celestina Boninsegna, and Maggie Teyte singing (of all things) Amy Woodforde-Finden's "Kashmiri Song".

An incidental pleasure of Gordon Bromly's recitals is the equipment he uses for playing the records. Gordon is, of course, Chairman of the Recorded Vocal Art Society, and he invariably uses that Society's apparatus in preference to our own. This is not difficult to understand, for their transcription unit is a delight to behold, having a space-age sophistication to its engineering, and such vanities as a digital readout to indicate the infinitely variable speed of the turntable. For those of us who covet one just like it, it is galling to learn that few were made before their manufacture was discontinued, and those few were very, very expensive.

A.O.Leon-Hall

The APRIL MEETING at Bloomsbury (on the 29th) will be given by the Chairman, Ted Cunningham. The title will be "Sharing it Around". Ted tells us that he will be showing how record collections need not lie idle, but can be used for the benefit of the local community, and giving examples of ways in which he has done this in his own locality. Knowing Ted, I suspect this title gives away little idea of entertainment in store ...



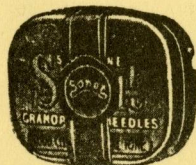


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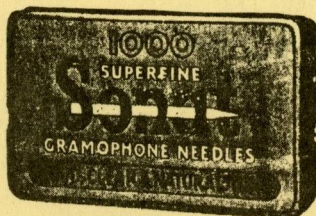
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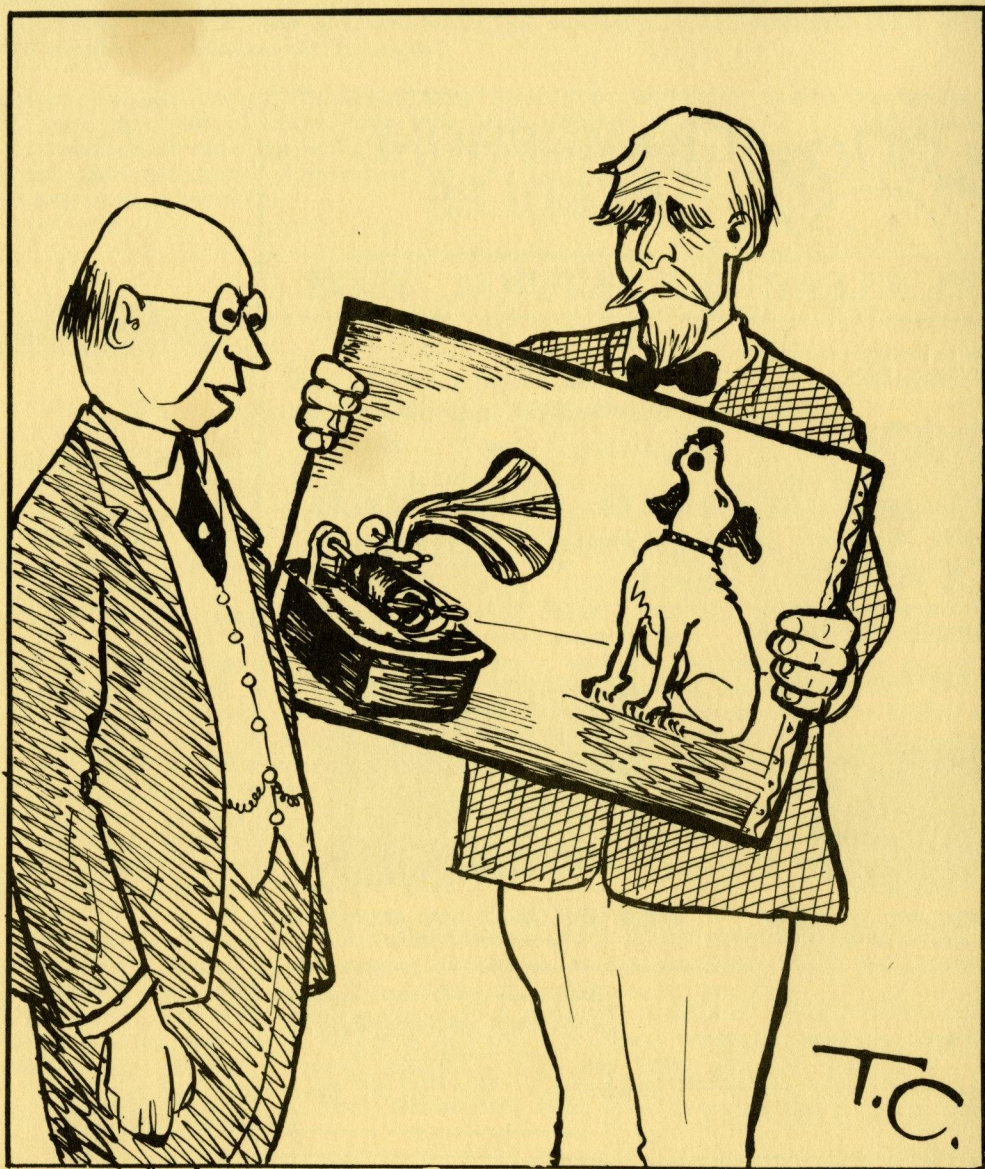
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